Chapter 3: Creating the Context for Standards-Based Education

Polls show that the general public continues to endorse standards-based education even when there is a lack of unanimity on which standards should be included or how high the performance bar should be set.[1] In fact, 49 of the 50 states have now adopted academic standards. Americans are accustomed to high standards in matters of daily life, such as in the purity of drinking water and the composition of construction materials. These expectations are so ingrained in the social fabric of American life that people feel shortchanged if expectations are not fully met at all times.

Californians are now entering an era in which high standards are expected of public high schools. At the same time research findings show that successful high schools share two characteristics:

- All students are expected to master the same rigorous academic content.
- The curricula are challenging and relevant and cover content in depth.

The call for standards requires educators to create the context for meeting those high expectations.

Creating the School Culture to Support Standards-Based Education

Creating a school culture that supports standards-based education is essential. The responsibility for creating this school culture belongs to every member of the school community under the leadership of site and district administration.

Some general indicators of what a standards-based school culture looks like are noted below:

- *Students* know what standards are, why they are important generically and personally, and which standards will present specific challenges to them. Although standards may not rival Friday night's dance as a lunchroom topic, students can discuss their progress toward mastery and their plans for completion. They know what standards are being targeted by each assessment, and they are aware of what they need to know and be able to do to meet required performance benchmarks.
- *Teachers* refer to the standards targeted for instruction and assessment, and written assignments incorporate these standards. Feedback on assessments is tied to the standards targeted and the performance level required to demonstrate mastery. Grades reflect progress toward mastery. Teachers regularly work together to ensure continuity and alignment in their assessment of standards and interpretation of students' performance.
- *Administrators and counselors* are familiar with the standards, both those expressed as local outcomes and the state content standards—especially those tested in the *California High School Exit Examination* (*CAHSEE)* and the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. They can explain the rationale for standards, how standards operate in the school, which standards are addressed in which classes, how the standards relate to high-stakes testing, and how they apply to the multi-option nature of the school's opportunity-to-learn design. They can explain *CAHSEE* target standards (e.g., grade six, Mathematics Standard 1.1: "Compute the mean, median, and mode of data sets"). And, finally, they can provide examples of the mathematics or language arts skills involved at the proficient level.

- *The school environment* reflects the importance of standards and high-stakes assessments. Walls and bulletin boards include displays of student achievement relative to standards. State test scores are posted with goals noted for the next year. Additional local outcomes, including Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLRs), an interdisciplinary statement that embodies the school vision, are found throughout the building; and student mastery is assessed periodically throughout the school year.
- *The district administrators and board members* also understand what the school is doing about standards-based education and why. They have all reviewed the sample *CAHSEE* questions so that they understand the school's challenges. They are proactive in supporting the school's opportunity-to-learn efforts. For example, their speakers' bureau presentations to community groups focus on standards—why we have them, what they are (and are not), how they are assessed, how local students and student subgroups measure up, and what the school is doing to support success for *all* students.

How does a school come up with the ideal standards? There are many paths, but research points to one essential strategy: providing ample and appropriate professional development, with sufficient time for ongoing and targeted staff collaboration.

Providing ample and appropriate professional development is reflected in the following statement: Staff development and planning emphasize student learning and achievement.

The type of professional development required for standards-based education depends entirely on two issues: (1) the readiness of the school to implement this approach; and (2) the types of programmatic and structural changes the school is ready to make to ensure a standards orientation. California high school administrators and staff leadership can begin to address those issues by providing the following resources:

- An overview of standards-based education and how it relates to high stakes assessments, the opportunity-to-learn options, and research-based options for implementation

- An extended, guided planning period to determine the readiness of the school, the best options for implementation, and how and when implementation will take place
- Specific training and guidance in implementing standards-based instruction and assessment and opportunity-to-learn options

Mounting research indicates that an essential factor in ensuring student learning is a well-trained teacher.[2] However, the traditional model for training teachers and upgrading their skills no longer fits most teachers' needs. New professional development models should feature the following approaches:

- Involving teachers in setting objectives
- Assessing teachers' needs and designing development activities that meet them
- Tailoring activities to match the local teaching environment
- Providing continual support[3]

No single model of standards-based professional development is suited for all schools. Opportunities for such development must flow from staff-identified needs to implement staff-endorsed programs to meet school community goals. The California Department of Education resource *Designs for Learning* helps teachers develop and implement a professional development plan that will significantly affect what they do in the classroom and make a difference in their ability to help all students reach high standards.[4] Activities such as those discussed above meet both the guidelines found in *Designs for Learning* and the requirements under California's Instructional Time and Staff Development Reform Program (ITSDR).[5] However, the ITSDR maximum of three paid professional development days will not provide nearly enough time to implement standards-based instruction.

So what is a high school to do? In short, staff *must* find additional time for professional development. The following strategies may help teachers find that time:

- Coaching, which fits professional development into "corners" of the existing schedule

- Augmented professional development days, which provide more training time
- Ongoing staff collaboration, which adds professional development opportunities into the structure of the school week
- Online professional development, which offers instruction anytime, anywhere
- Action research, which builds staff development into the classrooms and department meetings

These strategies are further described in the following subsections:

Coaching

One option may be to provide continual professional development through the use of a high school coach. California high schools increasingly are using coaches to assist as reform-strategy experts, systems-change facilitators, critical friends, and resource brokers. Depending on the agreed-on role, coaches will provide direct, honest feedback and critiques; share ideas, research, and expertise; and teach and model the skills of data-based inquiry. Good coaches always operate from a theory of action, continually assessing the school from multiple perspectives and asking critical questions to challenge assumptions and expand thinking.

Coaching fits professional development into the nooks and crannies of an existing school schedule. A good coach can work with the principal, the leadership and other school community teams, the whole school staff, the individual departments, and clusters of teachers. A coach can also provide the external expertise to help members of the school community, including parents and school board members, understand the importance of standards-based education, the complexity of its implementation, and the tremendous value of its outcomes.

Finally, coaches promote and support efforts to close the achievement gap for English learners, students living in poverty, and students of color. They understand the changes a district and school must make before all students can achieve equitable learning outcomes. Coaches can be an invaluable addition to the district's and school's efforts to achieve this high-priority goal.

Choosing a coach is like selecting a principal: there must be a balance of attraction and complementary assets. The coach should be someone that all stakeholders rank somewhere between "This is the perfect person" and "I'm not in love, but I can live with this one." She or he must be someone who has a strong history of working in standards-based education and establishing relationships of trust and respect. She or he must clearly possess the ability to work with *all* stakeholders.

Augmented Professional Development Days

Another option is to generate funding to augment the Instructional Time and Staff Development Reform days and then purchase the needed expertise. For example, schools awarded planning or implementation grants under the federal Smaller Learning Communities Program (SLCP), California's Specialized Secondary Program (SSP), or the California Partnership Academies (CPA) may use grant-funded staff development days to implement the parts of standards-based education that focus on personalizing the learning process, such as block scheduling. Federal GEAR UP grants offer a similar opportunity, helping middle and high schools ensure that every student is prepared for postsecondary education.

Detailed information on SLCP is available on the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Web site <*http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SLCP*>. Information on SSP and CPA is available on the California Department of Education Web sites <*http://www.cde.ca.gov/ssp/*> and <*http://www.cde.ca.gov/partacad*>, respectively. Information on the national GEAR UP is available on the Office of Postsecondary Education Web site <*http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup/*>. Information on California GEAR UP is available on the California GEAR UP Web site <*http://www.castategearup.org*>.

Ongoing Staff Collaboration

One need is absolutely clear from the experience of hundreds of high schools initiating standards-based instruction: teachers *must* have significant time for collaboration to implement and maintain a standards-based system. So how does a teacher find that kind of time in schools with a

tight budget and faculty already doing extra duty to compensate for the teacher shortage?

Although various solutions have been proposed, only one seems to be universally available and economically feasible in terms of providing the time for collaboration required to institute and maintain a standards-based system. This approach involves manipulating the school schedule to use some of the minutes normally included in the contract workday but not presently used for teaching or other formalized activities.

If a teacher's contract stipulates that the workday is 8 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. (except for a twice-a-month half-hour staff meeting 3:15–3:45 p.m.), classes might normally start at 8:15 a.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. That leaves one hour that is potentially usable each day. For example, say a school has a simple alternate-day block that provides six classes for each student, as in the traditional model. However, there are longer periods and fewer classes per day. The alternate-day schedule runs as follows: Monday and Thursday, periods 1, 3, and 5 meet for 100 minutes; Tuesday and Friday, periods 2, 4, and 6 meet for 115 minutes; and on Wednesday, the traditional schedule with all six periods is followed. If six minutes per day is added to the block classes and classes on Wednesday are shortened to 41 minutes, one hour and 12 minutes of planning time is created on Wednesday morning. This "found time" has been created without losing one instructional minute, without using any precious staff development days, and without violating the contractually defined work hours.

There are many ways to adapt scheduling and, fortunately, no special expertise is required. Some methods include advisory and tutorial periods. A fairly comprehensive set of examples and instructions on "do-it-yourself" schedule building with options is available on the Sonoma State University Web site <*http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/highschoolreform*>. The examples all include time for teachers to do collaborative planning.

Care must be taken to avoid major pitfalls in implementing time for collaboration. Several California high schools created weekly work time for collaboration only to have it taken away after a year or two because their local school boards perceived that collaboration time had become simply an extra prep period (or worse, that teachers were just showing up

late). It is essential for faculty to agree on work products to be produced during the collaboration time and for administrators to identify these products clearly to the district, the board, and the school community at large.

It is also important to guard against subtle—and not so subtle—raids on collaboration time. There is always more work for staff to do than can possibly be accomplished in a high school, and the temptation to use collaboration time to fill these needs can be overwhelming. Every staff member must commit to protecting the time for collaborating on standards-related work.

Online Professional Development

Technology may play an important role in implementing a comprehensive staff development plan that meets the needs of all staff members within the constraints of existing time. Web sites, such as the Teacher Professional Development Institute (TAPPED IN) project, a teacher professional development model, provide education professionals with workshops, mentoring, and the opportunity to share resources and participate in collaborative inquiries with content experts <*http://www.tappedin.org*>. In addition, the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education provides a Web page with links to resources in humanities, social sciences, mathematics, technology, science, and arts education <*http://www.nfie.org/resources.htm*>.

Action Research

Unlike "sit-and-get" training, action research is an effective professional development approach.[6] Teachers support each other's intellectual and pedagogical growth and actively engage in research on teaching and learning. For example, a group of teachers meets regularly to discuss their students' work. Between the meetings they try out pedagogical and curricular ideas from the group. They then report to the group on successes and failures and critically analyze the implementation of the idea. This process not only increases pedagogical content knowledge but also increases teachers' understanding of their subject areas.[7] Most of the professional development is carried out in the classroom and frequently in department meetings.

Creating Vertical Alignment with Feeder Middle Schools

Students do not arrive at the high school from the unknown; most come from feeder middle schools, and these institutions must be looked on as important allies in the standards cause. Research on successful schools indicates that strong partnerships are forged with middle schools as well as with postsecondary education institutions.

One of the advantages of the California content standards is that they span all grade levels, kindergarten through grade twelve, making clear the skills and knowledge covered at each level. More than half of the standards tested on *CAHSEE* are middle school standards.[8] The local standards promulgated by the community also must begin to be addressed in the middle schools to ensure mastery by high school graduation.

Instituting vertical alignment is more challenging than it appears on the surface. Twenty-nine percent of California's high school students are served in 92 high school *districts*, a relatively rare configuration in the U.S.

These high school districts have a total of 572 feeder districts, many with multiple feeder schools. This situation presents unique and significant challenges to articulation and alignment. Rural high schools within unified school districts sometimes face similar problems if they accept students from other kindergarten-through-grade-eight districts. Even in kindergarten-through-grade-twelve unified school districts, middle and high school teachers in the same discipline may never have met, much less had an extended conversation about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In standards-based education, these conversations must take place for alignment efforts to succeed.

Some of the ways to provide this dialogue are described in the following approaches:

Joint Staff Development Days with Collaboration Time

If high school and feeder middle school districts align the staff development days on their calendars and the schools agree on a common topic (e.g., creating standards-based assessments), professional development

workshops may be held jointly. If space permits, faculties can meet in one location; if not, the workshops may be held simultaneously in different locations with groups of middle and high school teachers meeting together or by department.

Additional networking opportunities and collaboration time can be provided after the workshop if the main presentation is planned with time to spare. During this time the joint schools' staffs can plan their overall approach to the crossover standards, assess progress, discuss student outcomes, and so forth.

Joint Committees on Crossover Standards

If middle grades and high school departments plan together to analyze the specified crossover standards, they can develop grade-appropriate assessments and benchmarks to ensure that middle schools are adequately preparing incoming freshmen to pass *CAHSEE.*

Developing crossover standards is not a minor undertaking. In mathematics alone, 42 standards tested on *CAHSEE* are for students in grades six through eight. If the committee took on one standard a week, it would have plenty of work for a year.

Early Identification of Students Having Difficulty with Crossover Standards

The identification of students needing extra help in meeting crossover standards can be highly beneficial to the high school, especially if that identification is completed by the beginning of grade eight. The high school can help the middle grades to initiate interventions even before eighth grade graduation. Those interventions might include tutoring through federal grant programs, such as Talent Search and GEAR UP, or through cross-age tutoring using high school students to work with middle school youths. Talent Search assists young people and adults who have academic potential; it provides counseling and encourages them to graduate from secondary school and enroll in programs of postsecondary education. Additional information on Talent Search is available on the TRIO Web Site <*http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/HEP/trio/*>.

As a result of changes to the California *Education Code,* high schools have established supplemental instructional programs[9] for students who:

- Do not demonstrate sufficient progress toward passing *CAHSEE.*
- Have been recommended for retention or who have been retained between middle school and the beginning of high school.[10]

Education Code Section 37252 requires a student who has been retained to participate in supplemental instructional programs.[11]

Some high schools have also established a mandatory summer school for students who fail grade eight. Middle school students rarely fail due to inability to master the material. Instead, failure most often results from the lack of motivation and follow-through. Because of the intense social stigma of repeating grade eight, some students who have failed are suddenly very motivated to tackle standards they may have dismissed in the past, and summer school can become a successful experience.

Development of a Continuum of Learning for Local Outcomes

Academic content is an essential focus for local outcomes. Therefore, the task of developing a continuum of learning for local outcomes must include a focus on academic content. Most of this task may be accomplished by the school district's work on state standards. Middle school teachers may already target other outcomes, including those reflected in ESLRs, such as "The graduate will be able to participate as a contributing member of a group of individuals from diverse backgrounds." ESLRs are often inherent in middle school curriculum and methodology but may not be formally taught or assessed. Alignment with middle schools and common endorsement of the outcomes may significantly ease the high school task of helping students in mastering local outcomes.

Notes

1. "New Survey Challenges Extent of Public Backlash Against State Testing." Washington, D.C.: The Business Roundtable, September 13, 2000 (press release). Available on the Web site <*http://www.brt.org/press.cfm/453*>.
2. Kati Haycock, *Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap.* Washington, D.C.: Education Trust, 1998. Available on the Web site <*http://www.edtrust.org/main/reports.asp*>.

3. Mary G. Visher and others, *Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings.* Berkeley: MPR Associates, Inc., 1999, pp. 42–43. Available on the Web site <*http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/nahs*>.
4. Information on *Designs for Learning* is on the Web site <*http://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/pdf/designsintro.pdf*>. Materials developed are a part of the California Professional Development Reform Initiative.
5. California's Instructional Time and Staff Development Reform Program, Senate Bill 1193, Chapter 313, Statutes of 1998, *Education Code* sections 44579–44579.4. Senate Bill 1193 is available on the Web site <*http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/97-98/bill/sen/sb_1151-1200/sb_1193_bill_19980819_chaptered.pdf*>.
6. A list of action research links is found on the Web site <*http://www.mcrel.org/resources/links/action.asp*>.
7. A. Feldman, "Teachers Learning from Teachers: Knowledge and Understanding in Collaborative Action Research." Palo Alto: Stanford University, 1993 (dissertation).
8. Blueprints for Language Arts and Mathematics for *California High School Exit Examination.* Available on the Web site <*http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/cahsee/admin.html*>.
9. Supplemental instructional programs may be offered during or in a combination of summer school, before school, after school, Saturday, or intersession instruction. Services may not be provided during the student's regular instructional day.
10. The middle to high school transition typically occurs between eighth grade and ninth grade. However, the timing of this transition may vary depending on the grade configuration of the school or school district.
11. *Education Code* Section 37252 states: "Notwithstanding the requirement of this section, the school district or charter school shall provide a mechanism for a parent or guardian to decline to enroll his or her child in the program. Attendance in supplemental instructional programs shall not be compulsory within the meaning of Section 48200." (Sec. 48200 states, in part: "Each person between the ages of 6 and 18 years not exempted under the provisions of this chapter or Chapter 3 . . . is subject to compulsory full-time education.")